



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 2, 2005

The Honorable Duncan Hunter  
Chairman  
House Armed Services Committee  
2120 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ike Skelton  
Ranking Member  
House Armed Services Committee  
2120 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman Hunter and Ranking Member Skelton:

We write today to express our strong support for the expansion of TRICARE eligibility for Guardsmen and Reservists included in the Senate passed version of the National Defense Authorization Act, S. 1042. We appreciate the committee's continuing support for efforts to ensure that we can recruit and retain members of the Reserve Components.

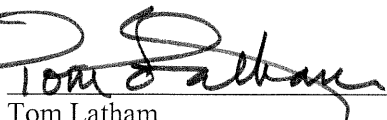
With over 40 percent of U.S. personnel in Afghanistan and Iraq serving as National Guard and Reserve members, the role of the Reserve Components has been transformed to play a central part in providing for the national defense. Since September 11<sup>th</sup>, we have had more than 500,000 Guard and Reserve mobilizations. In light of growing recruitment problems, it is vitally important that we maintain our force of highly skilled citizen-soldiers. As you know, the Guard and Reserve were short more than 20,000 recruits in FY2005. With regard to retention, according to one survey 76% of Guard members say having consistent access to health benefits regardless of mobilization status would "greatly affect" their decision to stay in the Guard.

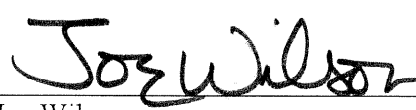
The Federal Employees Benefit Program (FEHBP) covers part time civilian federal employees if they agree to pay increased premiums. At a minimum we owe our citizen-soldiers the same access to health care with a cost sharing arrangement. These soldiers train a minimum of 48 hours per month and an additional two weeks per year. At any time they can be mobilized to serve in contingency operations. The Senate provision allows only Guardsmen and Reservists in drilling status access to TRICARE Standard and its network of providers.

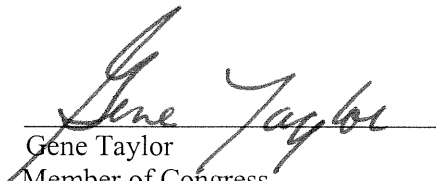
Current military planning indicates the Guard and Reserve will continue to play an essential role in national defense for the foreseeable future. The Global War on Terrorism is the first major contingency operation relying heavily upon the Reserve Components since the transition to an all-volunteer force. It has become clear that adjustments to Cold War-era personnel policies are needed to maintain an acceptable level of readiness in the Total Force. The greater requirements for sacrifice and service placed on the Guard and Reserve must be matched with greater commitment to them on our part.

Consistent access to TRICARE will provide an important tool to bolster recruitment, retention, family morale and overall readiness for the Guard and Reserve. We hope that you will support this provision. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

  
Tom Latham  
Member of Congress

  
Joe Wilson  
Member of Congress

  
Gene Taylor  
Member of Congress

Cc: Members of the House Armed Services Committee

~~Jim Simmons~~  
~~Ray School~~  
Chris Van Halbe

Scott Garrett

Laredo Russell

~~Lee Perry~~

J. Hae

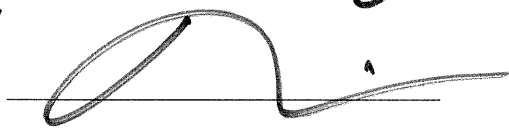
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